

Andrew Critchlow

Skill: IT PC & Network Support

From: Northumberland
Competed in: WorldSkills 2007, Shizuoka
Employer: Bedlingtonshire Community High School
Result: Medallion for Excellence

Qualifications

- 9 GCSE's Bedlingtonshire High School
- 2 A-Levels – IT, Media Studies (Bedlingtonshire Community High School)
- CCNA – Cisco Certified Network Associate
- CCNP – Cisco Certified Network Professional (City of Sunderland College)
- MCSE – Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer



Twenty-two year old Andrew has loved computers since he bought his first one as a young child but little did he know that some ten years later he would be representing his country as part of Team UK at WorldSkills 2007 in the IT PC & Network Support competition and winning a Medallion for Excellence for his work.

So how did it all start?

Andrew was already into computers before he joined his secondary school and spent his spare time building them and learning all about the software available. This love for all things technological continued while he studied at school - so much so that he was asked if he'd like a job helping the schools IT technician. The job transformed into full time employment after he finished his A-Levels. But, for Andrew that wasn't enough – he decided to sign up for night classes too, and it was here, having spotted his natural talent, that his lecturer recommended that Andrew go into competing.

Was training for WorldSkills difficult?

Andrew lives and breathes computers. He says: "Training for WorldSkills was tough, but it would have been worse if I didn't enjoy the subject. I'd finish a day working with computers at the school and come home and practice on my home computer for the competition. But I knew the best preparation is practice." A true self motivator, Andrew also decided to attend another three evening classes a week on top of his private study. It was eight months of hard work, but it would prove to pay off for Andrew.

How did Andrew feel when he arrived in Japan?

"Japan is a beautiful place. It's very different from the UK, but once the jet lag wore off I was fine. Seeing so many people come and watch you was intimidating at first but I knew that I needed to concentrate on the competition and I was able to block out the crowds and just get on with what I was doing."

"The competition itself was hard but there was great camaraderie between all the IT competitors. I made good friends with the Brazilian competitor. He couldn't speak English and I couldn't speak Portuguese but we managed to communicate by signalling to each other and it helped us both feel more at ease about competing."

So the hard work paid off?

By the end of the competition Andrew felt exhausted. The concentration and effort needed to keep going for four days was immense and he had no idea whether he'd done well or not. But he had. Andrew received a Medallion for Excellence for his work, a great result which Andrew is very pleased about.

"When they told me I'd got a Medallion for Excellence it was a bit of a shock, but a really good one. I phoned home and told everyone immediately –my phone bill was certainly a bit higher that month!"

How does it feel to be back home?

"It was great to get home and see my family and friends. They are all really pleased for me, and they like the fact that I can spend more time with them now!" But have things changed since returning? Well, Andrew certainly feels that he has gained more confidence. His knowledge of the IT Support World is impeccable and he's also turned into a bit of a celebrity, having had his picture in all of the local newspapers.

So what advice would Andrew give to anyone wanting to enter? "Be dedicated. Definitely do it."

"Competing certainly has benefits. Your confidence, knowledge and ability will shoot up and this will only become more prevalent by the time WorldSkills comes to London in 2011, when more people will know about it. There's also no where else you can meet so many people from all over the World who are interested in the same thing as you are – that's a great experience in itself."

So where will Andrew go from here?

Well, Andrew certainly doesn't intend to sit around and do nothing. He's just finished his two year Cisco Network Professional course and is now looking at Open University degree courses in IT and Network Communications, he has other aspirations for his professional life.

"In five years time I see myself working for a big multinational corporation, somewhere like Microsoft, doing network support and working my way up to the top. I want to get to the very top levels in my industry"

And with his philosophy of "be the best you can possibly be", Andrew is sure to reach any goal he sets himself.

A word from Andrew's employer: Noel Gordon, IT Manager, Bedlingtonshire Community High School

Helping Andrew achieve success as part of Team UK was Bedlingtonshire

Community High School's first taste of WorldSkills. Andrew's college approached the school to see if they would support him to compete and the school happily agreed.

Does Noel think WorldSkills benefits competitors?

The answer is yes.

"I think that WorldSkills and competing in general is a very good idea which certainly improves the standard of training for the individual. I would certainly like to continue to be involved with WorldSkills."

And what would Noel's advice be for other companies thinking of getting involved?

"There is a cost involved which can be difficult for smaller companies and the competitor will need time off work which can also be hard but I would say to them, give it a go if you can."



For more information, please contact the PR Team, UK Skills: 020 7612 9260